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Farm cottage holdings

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Farm Cottage Holdings

A PLAN FOR THE
PRESERVATION AND BETTERMENT OF
COUNTRY LABOUR, AND FOR SETTLING
MORE PEOPLE ON THE LAND.

BY

H. B. M. BUCHANAN,

Author of 'Country Reader,' Vols. I. II. and III., and Joint Author of 'Lessons
on Country Life: a Guide for Teachers' (Macmillan).

Published by

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Careful Plans

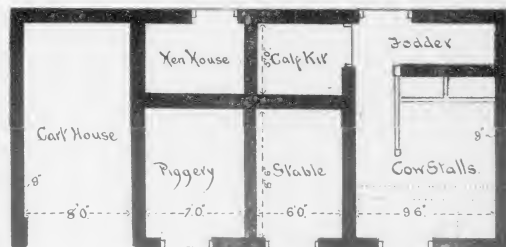
By the author of "The New Plan"
Published by the author

FARM COTTAGE HOLDINGS.

A Plan for the Preservation and Betterment of Country Labour.



PHOTOGRAPH OF RED BRICK, TILED AND SCUTTED BUILDING, ON THE ESTATE OF THE WRITER FOR SMALL PASTORAL HOLDING OF SIX ACRES ATTACHED TO COTTAGE, TO CONTAIN TWO COWS, HEIFER, BREEDING SOW OR FATTENING PIGS, POULTRY, PONY OR DONKEY, AND AN OPEN CARTHOUSE.



Ground Plan

THE COST OF THIS BUILDING WAS:—ESTATE LABOUR, £36; MATERIAL, £66; CARTAGE, £21; FENCING, £8. TOTAL, £129. THIS SUM INCLUDES A LEAN TO DAIRY, ATTACHED TO COTTAGE, WHICH IS NOT SHOWN.

A Wooden and Tiled Building with brick foundations, which, if tatted over from time to time would last for years, could be erected at one-third less cost, especially if the wood and cartage were provided by the Estate.

FARM COTTAGE HOLDINGS.

A Plan for the Preservation and Betterment of Country Labour.

SPEAKING generally, there can be no question that the young and vigorous men and women, who have been born and reared in the country and educated in country schools, are leaving us to seek their livelihood in the populous centres. If this tendency townwards is allowed to progress unchecked, it will prove in the near future disastrous both to Agriculture and to the nation.

It is a serious loss to Agriculture, because if the acre does not yield its best on the lowest expenditure, the farmer cannot make a living, which of course means that the land is thrown out of cultivation, or, as is too often the case, it is not cultivated as it should be. The living of a tenant-farmer and the interest on the landlord's invested capital depends in no small measure on there being in the country a supply of skilled, experienced and interested labour.

In certain portions of the country, some farmers have of late been obliged to throw up their farms because of the scarcity of skilled labour, and many more farmers are unable to farm their holdings to the best advantage for the same reason.

I use the term skilled labour in connection with agriculture because skilled labour it is. There is no class of labour that requires more skill and experience than the labour that deals with the land. It is the greatest fallacy to suppose that anyone provided he is possessed only of strong muscles and good health, is competent to work in the country.

Ask any efficient tenant-farmer, and he will tell you that an unskilled, inexperienced workman will do him more harm than he will do good; that unskilled and inexperienced labour is useless to him.

To plough, to sow, to make and store the crop hay, to make a stack and to thatch it, to thresh the ripened grain, to lay a hedge, to dig a ditch, to breed and rear the various farm

animals, so that the markets may be supplied to the best advantage; to supply the milk, poultry, and vegetable shops with the various articles that they require—to perform all this work efficiently, requires experienced labour, observation, patience, system, and exactitude; and these virtues, it must be remembered, require a long period, it may be many years, before they are acquired.

The labour that we have to depend upon to-day is mostly the labour of old and elderly men, and when these faithful servants of the nation's best interests disappear it will be difficult, if not impossible, to replace them.

Not a Question of Wage.

I am often asked, 'What do you suggest as the best remedy for keeping labour in the country?'

I reply that I have no royal remedy, only the common-sense remedy of making it worth a man's while to remain in the country.

Is it a question of wage? Are the wages lower in the country than they are in the towns?

If a man leaves the country and lives in the town, would he be better off?

I have gone into this question of wages very carefully, and the facts and figures prove that, if everything is taken into consideration, the man who leaves us and seeks his living in the town is not so well off as he would be if he remained in the country.

Take my own estate as an illustration, and it is typical of most well-managed estates throughout the country.

The lowest wages are 14s. a week, and they run up to 16s. The leading labourers get their cottages rent free, others pay 1s. and 1s. 6d. per week. These cottages are built of red brick, and mostly have three bedrooms, a good kitchen, larder,

scullery, sty to hold two or three fattening pigs, and a place for coal. To each cottage there is a good garden attached, which is filled with vegetables and fruit. In addition to these regular wages there is extra money in the harvest time, thrashing time, the profits of keeping pigs and a bit of poultry, and the potato ground. Then there are blackberries, mushrooms, and all manner of odds and ends that a skilled woman can make use of.

And so when all is taken into consideration, I reckon that it is fully equal to a wage of 25s. a week; that is, that a man, if he were working in the town, would have to earn at least 25s. a week regular wage to give him the same degree of comfort.

It must be remembered that in the town everything has to be bought; every flower, every bit of parsley, every bit of vegetable; no going out in the morning and collecting some portion of the mid-day meal from the fresh fruit and vegetables growing outside the door.

We cannot value in figures the fresh air, the room and brightness of the dwelling, the free space and beautiful air for the children to frolic about in; the light and airiness of the school, and the personal interest that is taken in the cottager and his belongings by the squire, clergyman, and tenant-farmer.

No, it is not a question of wage, and the people know it themselves. On my own estate I have several instances of men who have formerly had experience of country labour, have left the town and returned to work again amongst us in the country. In the towns the wages of these men averaged 10s. a week higher in actual money, and yet the wives (and they really know) have told me over and over again how very much better off in comfort and in health both they and their children are than when they lived in town.

Position of Tenant-farmer.

Let us suppose, however, for a moment that the physical comforts of life were greater in the towns than in the country.

Can the tenant-farmer afford to

give any material advance in wage than he is now doing? I reply most emphatically, no. In the present state of agriculture, under the most favourable conditions, namely, the favourable conditions of good workable land, one-third being arable and two-thirds pasture, convenient working buildings, knowledge, industry, economy, easy access to good markets, the most efficient farmer is barely holding his own. He may be just paying the expenses of his farm and his own and his family living, if he lives carefully, but he is putting nothing by; in other words, he is just living off his farm and keeping his capital intact.

Of course now and again, with a stroke of good luck, if he gets a good contract for milk, or cheese fetches an exceptional market, or he trains and sells a finished hunter, carriage or shire horse, or he gets a good market for pedigree stock, he may make a little over and above the expenses of the farm and his own living, but he cannot reckon on this.

Position of Landlord.

It may be said, however: Well, the landlord can reduce his rent, so as to allow the tenant-farmer to give higher wage.

I should like here to state the position of the landlord.

In the first place, under the existing law, if a tenant purchases artificial manure or lime for the purpose of improving his land, by an arrangement based upon experience and experiment he gets compensation for the unexhausted part thereof when he leaves his holding.

So far as my knowledge of the law goes and my actual experience, under the general farming agreement, if a tenant-farmer takes possession of land in good heart, and in a few years by slovenly farming or by deliberate dishonesty runs it out, the landlord cannot recover for the damage done when the man quits his holding.

In a little book called 'The Making of the Land in England,' the writer, Mr. Peel, states that if the money spent on farm-houses, cottages, farm buildings, alterations, repairs, drainage, and all the incidental expendi-

ture necessary on the part of the landlord (I think he states for the last sixty years, to make the estates suitable for successful farming) were capitalised and placed out at 4 per cent. the interest thereon would more than cover the net rent-roll of the estates. In other words, the tenant-farmers are paying 4 per cent. on their accommodation, and nothing for the land they are farming.

These figures that I have carefully collected regarding my own estate fully bear out this statement.

My estate, as regards land and accommodation, and easy access to the best inland markets, is a very favoured one. If the money that has been spent over the estate on farm-houses, cottages, out-buildings, drainage, fencing, and all the odds and ends necessary for successful farming, were to be placed at 4 per cent. interest, it would more than cover the rent-roll of the estate; in other words, the tenant-farmers are paying 4 per cent. on their accommodation, and they are paying nothing for the land that they are farming.

Therefore, the position seems to be that the tenant-farmer cannot afford to pay a higher wage if he is to live and pay his way, nor can the landlord reduce his rents if he is to obtain a consoling rate of interest on his invested capital. And the cottager, as regards physical comfort, is better off than he would be if he had to seek his living in the town.

Real Reasons for Depopulation.

The real reason, I am convinced, why the young and vigorous life seeks the town, is because of the life, movement, amusement, and intellectual activity of the town. These young men and women have heard something about life and movement, and they very naturally desire to see something of it for themselves.

Merely working in the country (and this is a point I wish to emphasise) have in most cases nothing to look forward to to relieve the monotony of the daily work, and they have little or no chance of improving their position. But if these men, after some years of toil and saving, could invest their experience and savings

in working and stocking a small holding, in my opinion they would gladly put up with the dulness of the country.

It is a great force in every man's life to feel that something belongs to him, or that he has a prospect of something belonging to him. Looking forward to possessing something induces intellectual activity, hard work and thrift.

Now what do I mean by a small holding? I mean a small pastoral holding of about six acres, that the wife and family can look after while the man works for wage for the tenant-farmer, so that the family can, as before, live off the wage the man receives, while they can save or spend the profits of the small place. The stock of the place generally consists of two cows, a heifer, a breeding sow and fattening pigs, poultry, fruit, and vegetables, and in some cases a pony and trap. The wife makes the butter, and once a week takes the butter, eggs, poultry, vegetables, and fruit to market.

Practical Examples of Cottage Holdings.

This fact is quite certain, that the lesser industries will never be raised by the existing system of farming. The farmers have neither time nor capital, nor can they secure an adequate supply of labour to enable them to produce and market these commodities. If the lesser industries are to be raised in this country—and there is no reason why this should not be done—these lesser industries will be produced by the occupiers of small places, and in order to market these industries to the best advantage, the small occupiers will combine, as they have done in other countries, and as a result many extra millions a year will be forced out of the soil and spent in this country that now finds its way into the pockets of people living elsewhere.

I will now give a few first-hand facts, taken from my own estate, and under my direct personal observation, of what these small holdings have done to keep men in the country.

Two of my tenant-farmers have in each case two adjoining cottages in

their take; in each case one cottage has a small holding, while the other has not; the two cottages that have a small holding attached are never empty, while the two that have not small holdings attached are constantly empty.

Could you want a better established fact, where conditions are identical, than the one I have given? Two cottages adjoining, held under the same master; one is constantly changing hands and empty, while the other seldom changes hands, and is never empty. Again, two cottages adjoining held under the same master, but a different master to the first two; again one is constantly changing hands and is empty, while the other seldom changes hands and is never empty. There can be only one explanation surely, namely, that it is the small holdings attached to their cottages that keep these men settled.

Let me give you another illustration. The horsekeeper of one of my tenants is a good workman with a respectable wife and two children; he lives in one of the cottages attached to one of my farms of 255 acres, and he has lived in the same cottage and worked on the same farm for twelve years. One day he came to me and said that he must leave. I replied, 'What on earth do you want to leave for?' He replied, 'Because I must have a small holding.' 'Well,' I said, 'you shall have a small holding. Now let us sit down and we will go into figures. First of all you must pay me the same rent your master, my tenant, is now paying me, namely, 30s. an acre, and you must pay me 5 per cent. interest on what it costs me to put up the necessary buildings, build a small dairy on to your cottage, and fence off the land. This will probably cost £150, so that your rent will be nearly £3 an acre. Have you sufficient capital, at least £50, and can you pay that rent?' He replied, 'Yes' to both questions. I then said, 'Are you satisfied?' and he replied, 'Perfectly.' 'Very well,' I said, 'the place shall be up by a certain date.'

I have now probably kept that man on the estate for the remainder of his life, given him a chance of being in a measure his own master, doing well for himself and family, and held up

an inducement for the other cottagers of the estate to make a stay, living as frugally as they can in order that they may be in a position to become small holders themselves.

I may say here that this man's employer backed me up right loyally in creating this holding for him. Also that when I create a cottage holding, the holding is held direct from me, but I have an agreement with the cottager that so long as he lives in that holding he must work for the tenant-farmer to whose farm his cottage is attached.

The acreage of land is of course deducted from the take of the tenant-farmer's farm, with a proportional reduction of his rent.

The other day one of my agricultural labourers, having a small holding of four acres of land attached to his cottage rented at £3 an acre, gave me notice to leave. He is a young, good-looking, smart workman, with an equally clean and smart wife. I naturally did not wish to lose them off the estate, so I at once went to see them. 'Did they want to give up their holding because they were doing badly, because they were losing money?' 'Not a bit of it. They wanted to leave because they had done so well, because they wanted a larger and more convenient place. They had only been in their take eight years, and yet during that time they had made enough out of it to wish to take a larger holding.'

Some years ago was a terrible time for British agriculture; prices had gone down to their very lowest point, and to make things worse wet season succeeded wet season, the men could not get on to the land to clean it and work it properly, rank grasses grew at the expense of feeding grasses, and the harvest could not be gathered in fit condition. Landlords depending solely on their property and the best of the tenantry saw bankruptcy staring them in the face. Work as they could, save as they could, it mattered little. A great black sheet of despair seemed to be spreading over our fair country; the end of British agriculture seemed within measurable distance. Stout, brave men who never before failed on rent day to bring their full rent, now could

only bring part or were obliged to beg or time. To help tide their tenants over these terrible years, the landlords gave reductions of 10, 12, 15 per cent. of the rent. My predecessor gave a reduction of 12 per cent. But the smaller tenants of the estate, the small pastoral cottage holders, held their own bravely and did not ask or get any reduction whatever.

Small Farms.

I do not propose in this article to discuss the question of small farms that would necessitate the whole work and time of a man and his family, and upon the profits of which they would solely have to depend for their living without the addition of outside work, except just to say this, that under the conditions of farming as it rules to-day, the holding must consist of at least twenty acres, sixteen acres of which ought to be pasture and four acres arable. The man and his family must be hard workers, frugal, and efficient; and the place must be well in easy access to good markets. To create such small farms, even with the utmost economy, a considerable outlay would have to be expended on the dwelling and the necessary outbuildings, and the interest on this sum, added on to the existing rent of the land, would raise the total rent to a high figure.

For good land in the aforesaid proportions and situated handy for good markets, the average rent would be at least 30s. an acre. The cost of erecting a house and convenient outbuildings would be £700; 5 per cent. on this capital sunk—being 3½ per cent. interest on capital and 1½ per cent. towards repairs—would bring the rent to between £3 or £3. 10s. an acre. It is a great question whether a man and his family could afford to pay this rent and the other outgoings of the place, and make a comfortable living for themselves; the experiences of agriculturalists is much divided on this point. But there is hardly any divergence of opinion that these small 'farm cottage holdings' are successful.

The experience in our part of the

country is this, that after a man has worked for a tenant-farmer, having one of these holdings attached to his cottage, when he leaves for a small farm, where he has to depend entirely for his living upon the profits of the place, he is not so well off as he was formerly.

The position of some tenant-farmers, who have not a grown-up family to help them, as regards labour is a very serious one. One of my tenants, who milks thirty to forty cows morning and evening, was for several reasons rather adverse to his men having these cottage holdings. I pointed out to him that he had at present a staff of men who would find no difficulty in getting work elsewhere, and that if these men were to combine to leave him, say, just before harvest-time, he might wake up one morning to find himself practically a ruined man, with no one to milk his cows or to gather the harvest. But I said, 'If a few of your men had these small holdings attached to their cottages they would not think of leaving you, nor could they under agreement leave you with less than six months' notice, and so at least you would be secure of the labour of these men, which might enable you to carry things on until you had engaged fresh labour.'

My arguments and his own experience of these small 'farm cottage holdings' around has converted him, and now he is enthusiastic on the question.

There is also another fact that unquestionably depletes the population of the country. When the children of the labourer leave school, the majority of them, even if they wished it, cannot obtain employment. The farmer can only find work on his farm for a boy or two, therefore the majority of these young people are obliged to seek their living elsewhere; but if these small pastoral holdings were attached to the different cottages the work on these holdings would employ the time of a few of the young people most interested in the work of the land, and so they would be saved to the country.

Moreover, the work on these holdings, especially if greater attention

were given to the production of the lesser industries, namely poultry, fruit, vegetables, and flowers, would give these growing boys and girls some practical training in country work and pursuits, and so fit them in their turn to become efficient work-people.

I do not of course advocate a scheme that would indiscriminately attach these small holdings to every cottage. It is essential to the successful working of any scheme that the man should have saved a bit himself, that his employer considers him an efficient and steady workman, and—this perhaps the most important point of all—that he has a capable and thrifty wife. But I do earnestly advocate the adoption of some scheme worked by the Government of the country that will make it easier for the capable and hard-working agricultural labourers—when they desire it—to acquire these holdings.

Some scheme that will assist us, the many needy landlords, who have the will but not the means, to erect the necessary buildings at a lesser output than that which is now insisted on by the Board of Agriculture.

Some scheme that will assist the savings of the labourer, so that he may start on his way with a fair chance of success.

I firmly believe that if reasonable care were taken to formulate and to practically work some such scheme, the country would be no loser in the cash advanced and the interest thereon, and in productiveness, in physical health, and moral well-being she would be a great gainer.

These 'farm cottage holdings' might be the nursery for the agricultural labourer of the future, and the stepping-stones to the small twenty-acre farm, and we might hope, from the twenty-acre farm to the larger farms, that can take advantage of all well-tested experiments and labour-saving machinery.

The Question of Capital.

Supposing, however, the Government are disinclined to assist the labourers to acquire these holdings. Can a man under the usual condi-

tions, with a wife and family, hope to save sufficient capital to stock one with any chance of success?

I reply, Yes! and that by means of the pig-sty, a reasonable-sized garden, and a few head of carefully selected poultry.

If the sties are warmly situated, suitably floored, and drained, a knowing man can easily market four pigs in the course of the year, and if he has experience he ought to make a profit of between four and five pounds on his sty.

Fifteen head of carefully selected poultry should bring him in at least £5. Therefore, between his pigs and his poultry, he ought in six years to make £60, the necessary capital to start him.

I have cottagers on my estate making a net profit of at least £5 per annum out of their pigs.

One of my labourers, in an ordinary cottage pig-sty, is rearing a breeding sow with a litter of eight to nine little pigs, and by the latest accounts they are doing well, and, according to the present market price, ought to return him a handsome profit.

This man and his wife have just sent me a profit and loss account. In February, 1902, they bought four pigs at £1 each pig; they fattened three, and bred from one, and on Dec. 1—the same year, 1902—the net profit amounted to £13. The account has been most carefully kept, the original cost of the pigs has been taken into consideration, and all food bought has been deducted. The young pigs are not yet all sold, and are valued at 13s. each—a low figure. This has been accomplished in two ordinary cottage pig-sties. Pigs have been fetching good prices.

The floors of the pig-sties are paved with blue brick, placed on end and cemented and sloped, so that the pigs stand and sleep dry.

Mr. Cook, the introducer of the Orpington breed of fowls, assures me that a cottager can keep a few head of selected poultry—according to his system of housing and feeding—on a small strip of ground perfectly healthy for a very considerable length of time, and that he knows cottagers who make a net profit of 10s. a year per bird.

Objections to Tied Cottages.

From conversations I have had with many cottagers, and also conferences I held with two prominent labour leaders, who a year or so ago were trying to induce the agricultural labourers of our district to join a union for the purpose of improving their position, I learnt that a very strong feeling existed against the system of tied cottages; but I do not see, if the farmer is to secure that absolute necessity—namely, settled labour—how this system is to be avoided. The whole position is stated with admirable clearness and fairness in Mr. Rider Haggard's masterly work, 'Rural England,' vol. i. pp. 34, 39.

Equally with the tied cottages is their discontent with the system of tied cottage holdings. Owing to there being barely sufficient labour in the country, and in large districts nothing like sufficient, the farmer very naturally demands all the time of his men. This gives a man no chance of doing any work to improve and develop his holding; the whole work has to be done by the wife and children. True it is that on some farms a man can get days off by forfeiting wages, but to this a good business farmer as a rule objects.

A businesslike farmer maps out the day's work, and as he has only just sufficient men to perform it even scantily, any loss of days on the part of his men may throw the whole work of the farm out of gear.

I can only see one way out of the difficulty: the erection of more cottages, with these small holdings attached, so that while the men can work a certain number of days per week for the nearest tenant-farmer, they can devote the other days of the week to the improvement of their holding.

The tenant-farmer will thus be certain of obtaining a sufficient supply of skilled labour, and extra labour in the busy times, and the men in the small holdings would make up for the loss of the weekly wage by the more efficient cultivation of their holdings, especially in the production of the lesser industries—poultry, fruit, and garden produce.

An Appeal to the Government.

I do beg the Board of Agriculture to take the erection of cottages, where they are needed, into their serious consideration.

Two cottages built together, containing three bedrooms, front and back kitchen, small larder, and the essential pig-sty, striking the average, would cost about £450.

The rent obtained from agricultural tenants must not exceed 2s. per week per cottage, or £5. 10s. per annum. Thus the rent on the two cottages, costing £450, would amount to about £11 a year.

Could not the money be advanced direct by the Board on the application of needy landlords or village councils? The erection of cottages, of course, to be by the approval of the Board surveyors, and with nominal fees. Could not the Board make some arrangement with the Government, so that the interest on the loan and the sinking fund be paid by the rent that the cottages actually let for?

All that we poorer landlords ask is that we should not be out of pocket by the erection of cottages. I feel sure most of us would gladly give the ground necessary to attach suitable cottage gardens.

H. B. M. BUCHANAN,

HALES

(Near Market Drayton).

N.B.—Since writing the above I have been collecting evidence for a committee appointed by the Central Chamber of Agriculture, of which I am a member, to inquire into the reasons for the depopulation of the country.

I have collected evidence from every grade of worker connected with the land—agents, tenant-farmers, small holders, agricultural labourers, country domestic men-servants.

To one question, and to one question alone, they all gave me written answers in the affirmative, and that question was this:—

Would the fact of every competent man having a chance of renting a small pastoral holding in connection with the farm, at a fair rent, keep men in the villages working for the farmer?—Answers: Yes.



The . . .
Country Gentlemen's Association,
— LIMITED,
16 Cockspur Street, Pall Mall, S.W.

THE above Association, popularly known as the 'C.G.A.', is a society of Land-owners, Land Agents, Farmers, and others interested in the land, numbering many thousands, and residing in all parts of the kingdom.

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